

International Development Committee

Oral evidence: The humanitarian situation in Yemen , HC 1505

Tuesday 30 October 2018

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Members present: Stephen Twigg (Chair); Richard Burden; Lloyd Russell-Moyle; Mrs Pauline Latham; Chris Law; Paul Scully; Henry Smith.

Questions 1 - 78

Witnesses

[I](#): Jan Egeland, Secretary-General, Norwegian Refugee Council; Marwa Baabbad, Oxford Research Group; Dina El-Mamoun, Head of Advocacy and Policy in Yemen, Oxfam.

[II](#): Rt Hon Alistair Burt MP, Minister of State, Department for International Development and Minister of State for the Middle East, Foreign and Commonwealth Office; Louise Walker, Head of Office, DFID Yemen; Neil Bush, Director, Arabian Peninsula Department, Foreign and Commonwealth Office.

Examination of Witnesses

Witnesses: Jan Egeland, Marwa Baabbad and Dina El-Mamoun.

Q1 Chair: Good afternoon, everyone. This session is on the humanitarian crisis in Yemen. Can I welcome our first panel of three very distinguished panellists? Thank you for joining us today. We have an hour with you, and we are seeking, in that hour, to cover seven broad areas. What I will do is invite each of you to introduce yourself, and then provide us with a brief introductory update on the current humanitarian situation in Yemen.

Jan Egeland: Thank you very much for having this hearing. I am Jan Egeland. I am the Secretary-General of the Norwegian Refugee Council, a large international humanitarian organisation, and we are on the ground in Yemen.

Dina El-Mamoun: Thank you very much. I am Dina El-Mamoun, and I am the head of policy, advocacy and media for Oxfam International in Yemen. I am actually based in Yemen but here for a holiday.

Marwa Baabbad: I am Marwa Baabbad. I work as a project manager for the Oxford Research Group. I am also a researcher; I am a visiting fellow at the LSE Middle East Centre. I focus on youth and women's role in conflict and peace-building in Yemen.

Q2 Chair: Jan, could you first give us an update on the current humanitarian situation, and perhaps in particular tell us whether the access for humanitarian actors has got worse in recent months?

Jan Egeland: The humanitarian situation has got much worse. Access for humanitarian workers has become much worse. I would say, as a very old humanitarian worker, that I have seen the situation get relentlessly worse for the four years we have had this war, and now in the last few months there has been a free-fall. A free-fall means that millions of children, of civilians, will end up in horrific famine—the worst famine, I would say, of this generation.

Unless there is enormous change, unless there is action—and we would look to UK action in a number of areas—we will not be able to stop it, as humanitarians. Very often we ask for more money, and DFID is a very good donor. It is a donor that has been with us since the start of our humanitarian operations. Humanitarian relief alone cannot stop this relentless route towards the abyss. What we call for are UK initiatives for a ceasefire immediately—and we do that as humanitarians—and political talks led by the UN, without games and preconditions, now; also UK initiatives to open the country for civilian supplies and civilian traffic; and finally UK initiatives to avoid the economic collapse so that teachers and health workers can again have a salary and will return to their posts, and we will not have all Yemenis seeing that they have no buying power with their money and all ending up in economic collapse.



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Q3 Chair: Thank you very much. We will return to some of the, if you like, more political issues, such as the ceasefire and political talks, a little later in the questions. Can I press you a little further on the other two aspects of UK action that you highlighted—opening the country up more, and the question of salaries for public sector workers? Can you say a little bit more about what, in practice, the UK could and should be doing on that?

Jan Egeland: The UK is one of the four countries that can have the biggest responsibility to change the course of action now. First, you have the partners on the ground, you have the Saudi-led coalition and you have the Houthi Ansar Allah Government in Sana'a. On the one side, you have three countries that have influence; it is not the 190 countries who are members of the UN, but the US, the UK and France, and on the other side it is Iran. That is why I am also here, in a way, coming from Norway and saying, "You need to take initiatives".

On the access, there is hardly any fuel coming in. Some 30% of the fuel that is needed for this place has gotten in since June, and that is catastrophic for the health sector, for water and sanitation, for basic services. The airports are permanently closed. No patient can leave; no civilian supplies can come by air. Finally, access-wise, we are having infinite problems with all of the actors on the ground, in the northern governorates as well as the southern governorates. Again, many millions are also out of reach for us, because of the political problems: the war, the bombing, the infrastructure falling apart, the roads closing or being bombed, and then men with guns and power who stop our action through bureaucratic and other methods.

Q4 Chair: We are going to come to more detailed questions on famine, health and education, and then some of the broader political questions, but, Dina, would you like to add anything on the broader humanitarian picture?

Dina El-Mamoun: Broadly, in terms of the humanitarian situation, I would echo everything that Jan has mentioned, but also I want to add that, since the beginning of the year, the situation has got noticeably worse, to the point that we are now not only seeing the catastrophic humanitarian situation in the other governorates, where it has notoriously been problematic, but even in the big cities—even in places such as Sana'a and Aden. For example, whenever I go back I see long queues for fuel, for cooking gas. The streets are virtually empty. The shops are not as full as they used to be. When people do buy, they buy very little. This has actually been getting worse since the beginning of the year, but actually more dramatically since June of this year. Every time we go back, it is much worse.

In terms of access, I would like to add that we are struggling with different types of access issues—not just bureaucratic, but also political, in terms of there being areas we need to go to assist people but where we sometimes hear that we cannot go. Either they give us a reason, or we do not get a reason in terms of why. To get a visa to enter the



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country, we need two authorities. The process is much longer than it used to be, and this was so even at the height of the cholera crisis, when we needed to get people and supplies in very quickly. That did not happen.

Q5 Chair: Marwa, do you want to comment on the broad humanitarian situation.

Marwa Baabbad: I would echo everything Jan and Dina have mentioned. I would like to add there are also challenges that are not necessarily for the humanitarian providers, as I am not a humanitarian. There is a challenge that the Government of Yemen is constantly undermined by several actors within the area of their control, and the UK Government could really play a significant role in supporting Government institutions in Yemen. All the service delivery, fuel, water, sanitation and all of these areas are issues and needs of Yemenis that also need to be coming through a public sector, because the aid cannot continue the way it is; it is not sustainable.

That leads me to my second point here, which is that aid is very important, humanitarian needs are really pressing and the situation is dire. However, we need to move from humanitarian provision only in the densely populated areas, to other, ignored areas within the country, which is problematic. It is what I hear within my research, and it is what I hear when we talk to participants who join our programmes within my work with ORG. People feel that they are neglected by the aid and deprived of any services that they could get, that others get, mainly in the northern areas. So people of Taiz feel very vulnerable, as do people in Hadhramaut and other parts of Yemen.

Another point I would like to make is that there is a need to also recognise that the humanitarian situation is dire; however, it is not sustainable if we do not look into more stabilisation and development elements within the humanitarian response. These two things are very important, and they are mainly important also to the UK and the other international actors, not only the Yemenis. The more we neglect the areas where people feel that they are post-violent conflict areas, the more we allow space and a vacuum for non-state actors and extremist groups to occupy the space.

Chair: Thank you very much indeed. We are going to come back to those questions that relate to the different actors in a latter question.

Q6 Lloyd Russell-Moyle: There is a report out today in the *Guardian* that Saudi has been putting conditions on the aid that it has given to the UN and other development organisations, to make sure that they positively talk about Saudi Arabia and do not criticise it. I wonder if you have experienced that, or if you have heard of any organisations being gagged in that way in terms of aid from either UN bodies or Saudi Arabia, and what your thoughts on it are.



Jan Egeland: We do not take money from Saudi, because they are a party to the conflict. We would never do that. I have not heard that there have been specific requirements for the UN to speak nicely about them. Certainly, I find it very problematic when a lot of the aid comes from Saudi and the Emirates, who also wage war in the same country. That is why it is also important that we do get funding from Europeans, including the UK.

Dina El-Mamoun: It is the same situation in relation to Oxfam: we do not take money from Saudi Arabia or the UAE. However, I think there is a situation where it depends if they are putting money into a pool that others are contributing to, and there is a question about the percentage contribution from Saudi Arabia.

In relation to the question that you have asked, whether we have heard of any particular gagging in terms of what we say or even speaking positively about Saudi Arabia, I have not seen that. Then again, since we do not get the money from Saudi Arabia, maybe we are not best placed to answer. Having said that, previously, in my past occupation within the UN, what we have had is that Saudi Arabia needs to be mentioned in the banners, and so on. That is the limit to what was allowed before. This time, we were given assurances that there would not be any requirement, also in terms of portraying the name of Saudi Arabia, because it is also not acceptable within Yemen. Many local NGOs that we collaborate and partner with will not accept the money if it is coming from Saudi Arabia.

Q7 **Chair:** Marwa, is this something you know about?

Marwa Baabbad: Unfortunately not, as I am not a humanitarian.

Q8 **Mrs Latham:** The famine is obviously a major part of what is happening over there. How is it affecting the people who live there? How critical is Hodeidah port, or any other ports, in providing aid into that country?

Dina El-Mamoun: Technically we are not talking about famine; we are talking about severe, acute malnutrition and food insecurity. However, there is also talk of pockets of famine-like situations. There are two most affected parts we know about so far. There is Hodeidah, in particular, because of the conflict, but we go back, because these issues are very linked, to access. As some of these parts of Hodeidah are not reachable, we know that people are trapped, at least in the southern part of Hodeidah. We are not able to be in all parts of Hodeidah, but we know from local actors and researchers on the ground that malnutrition is acute at the moment in Hodeidah. One lady told us that she has only 1,000 riyals per day, which is just over a dollar, in order to feed her children. She said to us that she is petrified of dying of hunger, and she is not a one-off. There was another man who expressed that he would not even be able to flee if the conflict intensified.



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There are three aspects that are linked. Famine is closely linked to the deterioration in the currency and the rise in the prices of food. Food is available, but nobody is able to actually afford it. Thirdly, there is the access issue, and the scale of it. At the end of the day, as INGOs, we are not able to feed the whole population. If the situation continues to deteriorate at this level, this is the situation we are looking at.

Another area that has been affected is Al Azariq, and that is in the southern part of the country, just to show that this is not a north issue. This is north and south. In Ad Dali governorate, there is one district called Al Azariq, and we know there are 4,000 children under five registered as malnourished; 450 of them are acutely malnourished, and we know of at least nine who have died as a result. We are not dealing with one-off cases. This is a huge number of children who are affected. There are not that many organisations in all parts of the country, and we will struggle to fill the gap we are seeing before our eyes.

Jan Egeland: On Hodeidah, the UK needs to be commended for helping to open the port of Hodeidah, which is the main lifeline, last December. There was a very cruel, I would say, embargo on all transport, which also affected our humanitarian lifeline. The UK spoke up, and it showed your influence. The embargo on food was largely lifted. The situation today for the people, as we are all saying, is, however, worse than it was in December. Many more children will be falling ill to famine soon.

The fighting has not blocked the port; the port is still operational. However, the city of Hodeidah is being slowly encircled, which means that the roads out of this port are blocked one by one. We need a ceasefire. We need a UK initiative for a ceasefire. That port is the Liverpool of Yemen; wartime Liverpool was not as important as Hodeidah is now for Yemen.

Dina El-Mamoun: If I may add something, when the onslaught on Hodeidah started, we automatically saw a sharp increase in prices. The two are very much linked, because, again, it is the food supply line. We have also seen that the pressure applied back in June has halted the advance; that meant that food was able to get in again. We are looking at a situation where things speed up, and then we come back again. It is just a matter of time for those of us in Yemen in terms of when, again, we will encounter another situation where the fighting intensifies and with it no fuel, no food, back to the lines, and back to the escalation in terms of the prices.

For example, since the beginning, there has been a price increase of 350% for petrol. For diesel, it is more than 250%. The food basket of essential items has risen in value to 40,000 riyals, which is an increase of 140% at least. Meanwhile, we are struggling to keep up. What do we do? Do we change the amount of money we give to the beneficiaries? Do we set the amount we provide in dollars so that we maintain the value? At



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the same time, between one week and the next you could have a drop of 200 riyals in the value of the food basket.

Dina El-Mamoun: On ports, I just want to say one thing. I would like also to remind myself and everyone that I see a value in the UK's role in activating other Yemeni ports, because it is important. Yemen has also Mokha port; there is Aden and there is Mukalla. There are many ports that we also need to operate so that they can serve a wider population.

In terms of how tragic the situation is, I would like to highlight that middle-class families that I know—this is not from a report—who used to send their kids to private schools are now unable to feed their families. This is how drastic the situation is. However, there is a light, and here the UK has a role as well—DFID, and other international actors. The UK Government are supporting many development programmes in Yemen, and I would like to highlight that there are initiatives and there are entrepreneurial activities on the ground. There are women-headed households that are creating new economic cycles that circulate the money between those who receive high salaries from the UN and INGOs, through the very local-level people. It is important to invest in those initiatives. It is important to deliver support to these initiatives, because you are not only helping a small business; you are also increasing the market and the level of beneficiaries.

The second point, if I may very quickly, is that there is also a way to support the Central Bank of Yemen, because that is part of the riyal depreciation. If the UK and others pressure the UN agencies, when they purchase from local vendors in local currency, to make their exchange at the Central Bank, not in local exchange markets, that will support the Yemeni riyal and will help the wider community inside Yemen.

Q9 Mrs Latham: We heard earlier that the port of Hodeidah was open, but it was being strangled by people around the city. What more can the UK do to keep not only that port but the ports mentioned by Marwa open? The more ports that are open, the more chance there is of things getting to more people. How do you stop that stranglehold around each city where a port is?

Jan Egeland: There are a number of ports; that is true. There is also Aden in the south and so on. However, look at the World Food Programme: 80% of the food they require is best served, in this race against the clock and against famine, through Hodeidah. How do we avoid that most vital of ports ending and the lifeline being cut? By a ceasefire. At the moment, they are fighting in the suburbs of Hodeidah. They are fighting intensively in the south, and more and more up towards the north. The road from Hodeidah to Sana'a, the capital, is not a straight road; it is a wide and circular road, making it more difficult, more expensive and slower. That could also be cut. It is extremely dramatic, which is why we need a ceasefire yesterday. Hodeidah cannot be a fighting place. It is sacrosanct for civilian supplies for the babies of Yemen.



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- Q10 Paul Scully:** Can I declare my registered interest, having visited Saudi last year? When speaking to them about Hodeidah port, they also talked about a port they were looking to open in Saudi, on the north side of the border. I think it was Jizan. Are there any updates on what has happened with that? Is that working or not?

Dina El-Mamoun: Actually, there is not information in terms of Jizan and how it is operating. This is actually part of the issue in relation to Saudi Arabia. Where is the information flow? How can we cross-check what we are being told—that Jizan will operate or whatever? In reality, this is not a port that is affecting the situation in the country, because if it was working properly we would not have had this impact in terms of the food supply lines.

Jan Egeland: It is also, in my view, a very dangerous road. One of the parties to this conflict says, "All things can go there, but through us, so we vet, we screen, we control, et cetera". We need the most direct route. We need one that is not controlled by a party that is also bombing the place.

- Q11 Mrs Latham:** Obviously, there are a lot of very vulnerable people in this situation: vulnerable women, vulnerable children. What is being done to safeguard their security in terms of sexual abuse and harassment?

Marwa Baabbad: Sadly, there is very little on that end. Again, the focus is all aid and humanitarian, which is partly why we need more focus into a little bit of development and safeguarding. Through my research, and also through speaking to people who participate in our programmes, we know women feel very vulnerable, and there is no help and no access to health support or financial support or any form of support. Many women in Yemen are increasingly vulnerable to the imprisonment and torture of their children, their husbands, their male relatives. This happens in the north, under the de facto authority of the Houthis, and there is an element of that, allegedly, in the south.

- Q12 Mrs Latham:** Children are being tortured.

Marwa Baabbad: Young men. I cannot verify age here, but we know that there are child soldiers. That is a fact, and that has not been negotiated or brought to any of the negotiation tables or processes that have happened until today. It is important for the UK, as a leading country on gender, peace and security to highlight this. DFID is funding a lot of programmes for research and to understand more of these issues, but we need action beyond research and we need action beyond understanding what is going on, into actually helping those women.

The mothers of detainees have just issued a report, and it is horrific. It is really scary, and I do not want to get emotional, but it tells stories of abducted men and their experiences. There have been cases of people who were captured, for example, by the Houthis, who died under torture. This is, again, something that nobody talks about. We focus so much on the bad end of Saudi Arabia, which I am not saying is not there, but we



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also need to remember that Yemen is more than just Sana'a and more than just Hodeidah. There is an entire country that suffers across the board, from multiple actors.

Women and children are really, really vulnerable, and there is one element that could be helpful to those people, especially to young people and woman who are actually working on aid and humanitarian support, because these people do not actually get psychological support for themselves. I go, and I am exposed to so much pain and so much suffering, and at the same time I am worried about my family and the lives of those who I love, but, at the end of the day, I go home and feel guilty, because I am able to eat and feed my family. It is very dangerous for us not to look after those people, the humanitarian workers and aid workers, especially those who work with local organisations, because they are the most vulnerable inside the country.

Chair: Thank you. In half an hour, we have covered two of our seven questions, and we have another half an hour to do the other five. The testimony is so powerful, and we are incredibly grateful for it, but I am really keen that we do cover the remaining questions, so I make an appeal for really concise answers.

Q13 Henry Smith: You have already started talking about some of the logistical difficulties of getting supplies into the country, and the ability of public services to operate, but more specifically, when it comes to healthcare, what is the capacity of healthcare and what is needed to tackle the malnutrition and the cholera you have been speaking about?

Dina El-Mamoun: In terms of the health service, what we know is that 19% of health services are not functioning at all. About 31% are partially functioning. About 50% are fully functioning. That is the general picture, in terms of the health situation.

In relation to cholera, obviously it is the worst in the world. So far, we have more than 2,000 cases of death. However, in terms of cholera, what we have also seen is that the number of cases tends to be the highest in the places where there is most food security need. The two are correlated; we cannot disentangle the two. In that sense, what we need to be looking at is improving the food security, because that will also help with improvement in relation to cholera.

Again, the other issue we have faced in relation to cholera is access. We have not been able to visit, for example, places where we think most cases are coming from. We are not able to investigate the source of cholera, because of access restrictions to some of the areas. Most of our work has focused around chlorination, water systems and public health campaigns, et cetera, but, in order to address cholera effectively, we need two things. We need to be able to have access, to get the supplies into the country. Before Oxfam got in around 36 tons of supplies, but it took two months to get them to where they needed to be, because of access restrictions. We need those restrictions lifted, but then, also, we



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need the issues around famine resolved, particularly. Again, we go back to the same thing: the end of the conflict, the ceasefire. Without that, we cannot even access the most vulnerable areas.

Q14 Henry Smith: You are talking about malnutrition, famine and torture, so, relatively speaking, what I am about to ask seems minor, but what effect is the non-payment of public sector workers having, particularly on the delivery of healthcare?

Jan Egeland: It is having a devastating effect. You are politicians; it is important to come to you with things you can do. I would really like to see a UK initiative to untangle the payment of salaries to health workers—nurses and doctors—and teachers. Many of them have not had a salary for two years.

When, last year, I was in Yemen, I came to the main hospital of the capital, Sana'a, because there was a therapeutic feeding ward there for severely malnourished children. I came into the place and there were only two children. I asked, "Why are there only two children?" It was because all of the nurses and the doctors left last month; they had not been paid for a year. Two children were left. When they had been treated well and their lives saved, the ward was closed. What also happened, the same day, was that one of the mothers of one of the nurses came in and collapsed on the floor. Why was that? We suspect it was cholera. It seems to be breaking out. Since then, there have been a million cases.

So we need salaries through an economic initiative; it is not rocket science to get a trust fund up and running to give salaries to all of these public workers. The other thing that could easily be done is to open up civilian transport to the airports. No cancer patient who cannot get treatment in Yemen can leave the country and get treatment elsewhere, because the airport is closed to civilian transport, and thousands are dying because of that.

Chair: We will ask the Minister in the second panel on that precise point about salaries.

Q15 Chris Law: Jan, I have a question for yourself. I want to ask about the needs of displaced children. First of all, do you know how many displaced children there are in Yemen, and if their educational needs are being met, in part or in full?

Jan Egeland: We think there are around 3 million internally displaced people now in Yemen. One-third of those would be children. That is a minimum figure—a million displaced children. They end up in places where the educational system is already collapsing. I have heard of schools where there are 200 children in each class. The school day is two hours, and teachers have not been paid, again, for a year or two years, and only go there out of a deep sense of duty to the children. It could be worse. We are losing a generation here.

Q16 Chris Law: That was the point I was going to make: it sounds like a lost



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generation. I wanted to know, in particular, whether DFID have any focus on education programmes in Yemen for displaced children.

Jan Egeland: Yes. DFID is an excellent donor. You should be proud of the Department for International Development. Also in education emergencies we are getting DFID funding—certainly UNICEF and others are. It would be great if that could be increased. However, it is a little bit like putting another pump in a vessel where holes are opening all the time. The war has to stop. The economic collapse has to stop. You can help that.

Q17 **Chris Law:** I just have a last question. We talked about a lost generation of children; what is happening to those children right now? If they are not in education and are not getting support, are they vulnerable to extremist groups? Are they being recruited as part of this appalling situation in Yemen?

Jan Egeland: The answer is yes. Marwa mentioned it: children out of school are extremely vulnerable to sexual violence, violence in general, and recruitment by extremist groups. There are a lot of child soldiers on all sides on the ground in this conflict, in all the northern governorates and the southern governorates. There are girls being abused. Again, in a class with 200 children, of course there is much less chance to have protection.

Dina El-Mamoun: At the moment, the only way a child can support the family is to join one of the armed groups and get a salary. It is for sure they will get a salary, so that is the only way they feel they can support their families.

Q18 **Richard Burden:** When Martin Griffiths was appointed, internationally there was a great deal of goodwill and a lot of compliments about him as an individual. Several months on, what is your assessment of how he has performed?

Marwa Baabbad: It is not easy to assess the role of the special envoy's office, because it is not an easy one. However, there is now a silver-lining opportunity for the UK Government, the international actors and the special envoy's office, to do better, given the new appointment of the new Prime Minister in Yemen. There is so much hope—he was a member of the previous National Dialogue Conference, representing youth, and he is very keen on supporting the process in building governmental institutions—but also it is an opportunity. What the special envoy's office can do is be more inclusive, because that is part of the issue—that we are not seeing inclusivity across the board and across the process. When I talk about inclusivity here, I am not talking about the table of negotiation, because everyone is pushing for that, and the UK Government have been doing really well in pushing for women's participation in the negotiation. However, it is not enough, because they have not yet reached the table.



It is also important for the UK Government to push for an inclusive consultation process for the special envoy, before everyone comes to the table. That is very important for everyone to understand Yemen properly—to understand how actors respond. It is best to listen to some of the Yemen experts internationally, but also to the Yemenis. When I talk about the Yemenis, I am not talking only about the very well-spoken, English-speaking Yemenis who currently dominate a lot of the international discourse. There are others who are also articulate, well-spoken and well representing other parts of the country, and I think that is important.

There is also a perception by some of the Yemen analysts that the UN special envoy's office is not holding Houthis accountable enough in the process. Again, this is the perception of a lot of Yemenis and Yemen analysts—that there is a disappointment from what happened in Geneva, when the Houthis did not show up. There was so much praise for them, despite the fact that they did not show up. What we fail to take into consideration is the reflection of that on the ground, because the talk then becomes, "The internationally recognised Government is just so keen to be in hotels in Geneva instead of them doing their role", whereas the Houthis are perceived as holding their position strongly. There is so much about the optics of things that we need to pay attention to, in terms of how our actions are reflected on the ground. The UK Government could do a lot here.

The CSSF is doing greatly also, in terms of inclusion, with the project I am currently managing, which is bringing voices of tribal leaders, local actors, civil society into conversations, and linking these conversations with the special envoy's office. More of that is needed, because we are only covering two governorates, Hadhramaut and Ma'rib, through this project. There is so much more that we can do, and the British Government can do through this.

Jan Egeland: I agree with everything Marwa said, but I would like it on record that I think Martin Griffiths is doing everything that can be done as a special envoy. He did everything right up until Geneva, in my view. There was not enough pressure on the parties from the outside world. To me, it echoes a little bit of Syria in 2012. There was not enough pressure on the responsible parties, and that is what we are asking for. On your side, on the Saudi-led side, on Iran, on the Ansar Allah Houthi side, et cetera, he is really trying. He needs help. We need your help for the Yemenis.

- Q19 **Richard Burden:** That is helpful, thank you. Marwa, could you say a little bit more around inclusivity? If I have read you correctly, what you are saying is that if the peace process is going to work and be inclusive, it has to come up from below, in addition to the importance of pressure from above. What do you think the UN special envoy's office could do to promote that? You have given the example of the CSSF projects over there. Are there other things, either from a UN level or from a donor



level—UK or elsewhere—that could specifically be done to build up that inclusivity?

Marwa Baabbad: Definitely there could be more conversations with several actors, which the special envoy has started doing, for example in starting to talk to the Southern Transitional Council. However, we have to recognise that these are not the only actors in the south. Yemen has a great recipe, because we have had the national dialogue previously. When Houthis hijacked the process by their coup in September 2014, they stopped the constitutional process and the elections, and they deprived the Yemeni people of a peaceful transition. However, there is the NDC's representation when it comes to having 20% youth representation, and having minimum 30% women representation, in negotiations and in consultations. Maybe we could also look at Yemeni mediators in this. We have a good tribal system that is operating locally, which maybe we could learn from. Inclusivity is not only about seeing the people around the table, but is also about the process and it is about hearing about others. The UK Government could do so much in bringing those voices and increasing funds to listen to and hear from the population in other areas, like the people we are working with in Hadhramaut and Ma'rib.

I have one more point on the inclusivity of issues. Taiz, for example, is still under siege, and we are getting into three years of siege. That has never been a topic of discussion on the table. The UN process has failed to mention that as one of the issues. Looking at what issues we need to bring into this is also important.

Dina El-Mamoun: Very quickly, we know that women, for example, are now taking lead roles in terms of negotiations, releasing prisoners, et cetera, between the different parties to the conflict. This is happening at ground level, and there are now discussions at the higher level, but there are no connections between the two. Perhaps this is something concrete that Martin Griffiths should perhaps look into, merging and connecting the different tracks in terms of women's involvement, in particular, where they are actually doing great work on the ground. That needs to be lifted and connected to the track one.

Q20 **Lloyd Russell-Moyle:** This is a conflict that probably has more twists and turns than your average thriller novel, from 2004, when the Saudis first tried to organise the destruction of the Houthis; to 2011 and the Arab Spring and getting rid of the President; and then to the President getting into bed with his former enemies, the Houthis, and trying to get rid of the current President, who then has not gone for re-election. Along with all of that, you have Mohammed Bin-Salman, who was the Defence Minister in Saudi Arabia and is now the Crown Prince, who has been the architect of this particular, more aggressive form of aggression. Britain seems to be very much on the side of the Saudis—MBS—and has allowed them to inspect their own crimes and make their own number of deaths up. What is the UK's role as an impartial arbitrator on this, when we



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seem to have taken a side? How consistent do you see it, particularly around arms sales? The last Committee was very critical of arms sales. Do you see that we are particularly a country that can play that impartial arbitrator any more, or have we already thrown our lot in with one side or another, in this very complex civil war?

Chair: That is a massive and important question. I want all three of you to answer it, but really briefly so we can fit in our final question.

Jan Egeland: Let me start by saying, no, your chance of being an arbitrator is not gone, but it has to change from the way it is now. The time of being concerned and doing a little more humanitarian work, and talking with and urging the Saudis, is over.

Q21 **Lloyd Russell-Moyle:** What key things would change?

Jan Egeland: What would change is the US, UK and France saying, "We are your main arms salesmen, and we are your main intelligence and strategic partners, Saudi and Emirates alliance. We demand a ceasefire. Stop the air raids. Stop the campaign. Stop the offensive on Hodeidah. Let Martin Griffiths get the parties to the table" and "Houthis, end the games, go to Geneva and start the talks". You can do that. I am convinced. You showed in December that you could lift the blockade. You can do that.

Also, I think you should call for an independent investigation into violations of international humanitarian law, because it is also a preventative measure. We see all of this bombing and shelling from both sides of civilians, humanitarian workers, warehouses and so on.

Q22 **Lloyd Russell-Moyle:** Did Britain not block the investigation by the Human Rights Council and others? Is Britain the right body? In my private conversations with the people who have developed the current monitoring mechanism, they say that it is not designed to actually test innocence or otherwise of Saudi; it is just designed to test how they can bomb better?

Dina El-Mamoun: This is why there should be an immediate stopping of arms sales to Saudi Arabia. What have we seen in terms of the coalition airstrikes that have not ended in the killing of civilians? We are seeing airstrikes resulting in the death of civilians.

Lloyd Russell-Moyle: Like the wedding party.

Dina El-Mamoun: More recently, last Wednesday we had more than 20 people killed in an airstrike in Hodeidah. We had 15 people killed last month, and it is even affecting our own interventions: Saada, in an area called Hamazat, where we provided and supported water systems, has actually been bombed by an airstrike.

Q23 **Lloyd Russell-Moyle:** Our coalition has bombed our own aid.

Dina El-Mamoun: Yes.



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Q24 **Chair:** Marwa, from some of your earlier answers, you have given a sense that you feel the Houthis do not get focused on as much. Do you share the broad view we have heard from the others?

Marwa Baabbad: Yes, I echo that very strongly, to start with. Just to make it clear, I echo what they have mentioned very strongly. However, we have to remember that there are also other actors in this conflict. The US Marines have captured a shipment that was headed to the Houthis almost a month ago. This is dangerous. The Houthis have been land-mining across Yemen. There is a tremendous amount of casualties and deaths, and not talking about it is really dangerous.

As much as we need to look into how we interact with the Saudis in this, the UK Government should also work on pressuring actors like Iran into stopping aiding the Houthis when it comes to arms, and holding them accountable for their own atrocities.

Q25 **Paul Scully:** Can I ask what your assessment is of how the UK has used its role on the UN Security Council to pursue a stronger international response to the crisis?

Jan Egeland: I hope for a little bit more proactivity now. It is a bit mind-boggling that this is the worst humanitarian crisis of our generation; you could have the worst famine in your political life. It is one of the three or four worst wars in terms of shooting of civilians as well as fighters, and the last Security Council resolution was in the first half of 2015. There was a presidential statement more recently, but that is a presidential statement. That was pretty good.

We need a resolution that calls for an immediate ceasefire, and the main parties immediately going to the table, which can be followed by the good peace activities, but track two will not stop this war. The men with guns and power have to be held accountable, and the Security Council has to do that.

The UK is the penholder—it has been for years—and the penholder has to pen resolutions. Again, let us now have the UK not have its fingerprints all over arms transfers and a military relationship, but be designing the road plan for an end to this cataclysmic situation. Certainly, I think there must be a way to get Iran to put pressure on the other side. There are only four or five countries that can apply pressure, and you are one of them.

Dina El-Mamoun: Just on the point of arms sales, what we are calling for is an end to arms transfers to all parties to the conflict. We are looking, also, at what the UK can do, and for that they need to stop the sale of arms to Saudi Arabia as an immediate and pressing step.

Q26 **Paul Scully:** I am interested in what Dina just said, Marwa, about weapons sales. You just talked about Iranian arms, which presumably were coming from Iran. Are you seriously saying we need to do something unilaterally, without really being able to undermine the Iranian



supply?

Marwa Baabbad: As Dina said, what we need is to stop this from all parties. We need to stop arms reaching all parties, and part of the guided missiles the Houthis use is an Iranian product. This has been proven by the UN Panel of Experts report that was issued in January 2018. This is something that is established. We do not talk about it enough, and that is my point. Yes, the UK Government can put much pressure on all actors, definitely internally in terms of what they do, but also in terms of what they can pressure through their position as a penholder in Yemen and as an important international actor.

Chair: We have run out of time with the first panel, but I just want to say a massive thank you to the three of you. You have given us an extraordinary amount of evidence in an hour. We could have sat with you for three times as long and still not covered everything properly. Please feel to stay and listen to the second panel if you can find somewhere to sit—there are some chairs there. We are now going to have a chance to put directly to the British Government many of the points you have briefed us on in your evidence today. Thank you all three of you.

Jan Egeland: We will rely on you for follow up.

Chair: Thank you very much indeed.

Examination of Witnesses

Witnesses: Rt Hon Alistair Burt MP, Louise Walker and Neil Bush.

Q27 **Chair:** Minister, and your officials, welcome back. Thank you very much indeed for joining us. You are our second panel. As with the first, we have about an hour with you, and we are seeking to cover seven big areas. We are going to start with some of the big political context issues and then move on to the humanitarian development issues in the second half of our questioning. We have just heard very powerful evidence that the UK, as penholder at the UN, should be looking to take a lead with a new UN resolution to secure an immediate ceasefire. Is that something that you will do, Minister?

Alistair Burt: As you know, and as I said in answer to Foreign and Commonwealth Office questions today, the question of a resolution at the UN Security Council remains very much on our minds and it is constantly reviewed. It is just a question of what the most effective way is of using the UN Security Council and its authority. At present, our view remains that the best way of using the UN Security Council is through supporting the work of the special envoy, Martin Griffiths. As you know, on 15 March we proposed and co-ordinated a presidential statement, which called on the parties to agree steps towards a ceasefire. Any new resolution



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requires consensus and, as we have explained before, if it does not get consensus, then there is a sense of things being knocked back. That is why we support Martin Griffiths' efforts, and we do not want anything to undercut it.

However, it does remain under review. There is no point in producing something if the circumstances on the ground do not cause it to happen. As you know, the efforts that Martin Griffiths has been making most recently were thwarted by the Houthis, who refused to go to the negotiations in Geneva. Accordingly, we have to have some confidence that the negotiation procedure will be successful. Of course we want to see a ceasefire, but a resolution that requires it is only of point if it actually happens. As soon as the right opportunity occurs, we will bring it forward.

Q28 **Chair:** What do you say to the argument that a resolution for a ceasefire, through the UN, could actually assist Martin Griffiths in his work, by creating the political space for the dialogue that is so essential for peace?

Alistair Burt: I rely on Martin Griffiths' advice for that. If he does not think it will work for him, I want to take his advice, and we do.

Q29 **Chair:** Has he given that advice, Minister, that a Security Council resolution at this time might be unhelpful?

Alistair Burt: The Security Council is clear, and I am very sure that Martin Griffiths is clear—he has a meeting with the Secretary of State later today—that at the moment his best efforts are directed towards gaining the confidence of the parties to get them to negotiations. Of course, as a key part of that negotiation, you would want to see a ceasefire. Britain banging the table and demanding a ceasefire that does not happen is absolutely pointless.

Q30 **Chair:** Is there a fear that someone might veto a resolution at the UN Security Council?

Alistair Burt: The greater fear is that if it was not successful, it would carry no credibility. Look at the demands for humanitarian access in Syria, for example, that have been passed by the UN and ignored by parties in Syria. It does not do the UN Security Council any good. What is it we are trying to achieve here? If we are trying to achieve a resolution and a statement by the United Kingdom that we are doing something, that is all very well. If we are trying to see an end to this conflict, as we are, then let us work with the people who are most responsible for it. The UN Security Council placed its confidence in the special envoy. He got a negotiation organised with the Government of the Yemen and the other parties in Geneva, and then the Houthis decided not to go.

Q31 **Chair:** Was it as straightforward as that?

Alistair Burt: Yes.

Q32 **Chair:** The Houthis decided not to go.



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Alistair Burt: Yes.

Q33 **Chair:** There were not issues about whether the Saudis would allow the Houthis to get out of the country?

Alistair Burt: If they had wanted to go, they would have gone. Of course there were issues about planes, war wounded and the like. I am being very straight. No, I hold the Houthis responsible for not being there.

Q34 **Chair:** The Germans joined the Security Council in January. Is that an opportunity, in terms of some of the relationships Germany has with Iran?

Alistair Burt: Now you are opening something else up. This is a wider issue. Iran's engagement is interesting and, as the Committee knows, I have been to Iran a number of times. Iran should not be in Yemen; there is no interest for Iran in Yemen. I am sure they will deny direct involvement. The concern has been that missiles of Iranian origin, as described by the Special Committee of Experts of the UN, have been found to be those directed at Riyadh. Clearly, it makes it difficult for one side to agree a ceasefire if they are under threat from another. Accordingly, if there is to be any ceasefire, the confidence of both parties has to be that the actions being taken by the coalition in pursuit of the support of the legitimate Government of Yemen will be matched by a change in the firing of missiles by the Houthi in Houthi-controlled areas against Riyadh. We would call upon all parties with an influence here to play a part. There are certainly clear arguments that Iran may well have an influence in these circumstances.

This is a matter, again, for the special envoy, but the door is open to the possibility of engaging Iran—but, as I say, with some degree of care. There is no reason for the Iranians to be involved. If they are of any influence, and if that influence was exercised in bringing the conflict to an end, that would be so much the better for everyone.

Q35 **Lloyd Russell-Moyle:** In August, when a bus full of school children was bombed by the coalition, the UK Government did not issue a condemnation, although you, Minister, tweeted your concern. A month later, the Government put out a statement that again only contained concern, but condemned the Houthi attacks on Red Sea shipping and rockets that you have just mentioned. Is there a problem, and do you have a problem, with condemning murder and violations of international law? Why are you being soft on the Saudis, Minister, but hard on the Houthis, when the death toll is the other way round? Is it that we are part of this coalition?

Alistair Burt: We are not part of the coalition. We are not a party to the conflict. For the incident in August, we wanted to find out what had happened, and our duty and responsibility, bearing in mind the importance of international humanitarian law, is to do just that. There is a process, which the coalition went through, in terms of its own investigation into what happened. In an almost unparalleled way, it



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brought forward a response very quickly. It admitted error in relation to what had happened. There has never been any suggestion that there was any premeditated murder or anything of the like. It was an error in conflict. It was admitted. Reparations have been offered by the coalition in terms of the error. In terms of the failure of targeting, of course lessons should be learned. Any action that deliberately damaged civilians would be a matter of condemnation, from whichever source that attack had come.

Q36 Lloyd Russell-Moyle: These mistakes seem to happen repeatedly, do they not?

Alistair Burt: In conflict, mistakes are made.

Q37 Lloyd Russell-Moyle: Not repeatedly, and not without investigation. There was no investigation for the wedding party, because the investigation mechanism, I am told, is not designed to investigate whether something has happened or not. It is just designed to investigate whether something can be targeted better or not. *[Interruption.]*

Alistair Burt: Who is asking the questions here?

Chair: Lloyd, thank you.

Q38 Lloyd Russell-Moyle: The targets are repeated, and the targets involving civilians are repeated. It cannot be, I would put it to you, just a mistake. Your colleague in the Foreign Office, Alan Duncan, said in a Westminster Hall debate in 2016, "We are in conflict in the Yemen". Crispin Blunt, who is the former head of the Foreign Affairs Select Committee, says it is our coalition. The people in Yemen on the ground believe that we are the ones killing them. We arm the Saudis. Under historic contracts, we maintain the air force. We have British soldiers embedded in the control centres. We command the war flight paths. We train Saudi pilots in Wales in RAF Valley. The only thing we do not do is actually press the button to drop the bomb. Can we not just be honest? We are part of this war. We have decided to cosy up to a regime that dismembers its own civilians in consulates in NATO allies. That is the truth of the matter, is it not, Minister?

Alistair Burt: Let me disentangle some of this, if I may. First, if you are going to talk about our engagement with Saudi Arabia and the UAE in relation to this particular conflict, let us see where this comes from. What has happened in Yemen has been an insurgency by a rebel group to topple a legitimate Government, which sought assistance through the UN in order to restore its legitimacy and made a call for support, which was responded to by neighbours. They were neighbours who had had experience of being attacked by those who had caused the insurgency. In the course of this, in the conflict that has ensued, the coalition partners have themselves been under attack from missiles launched from Houthi-controlled areas, which have been directed at their capitals. In these circumstances, as the United Kingdom has made clear, our arms supplies



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are there for those who need to defend themselves, and every licence goes through the most thorough consideration, as this Committee is well aware, before anything is delivered.

In terms of the conflict itself, we are not a party to it. We do not control any flight paths or anything similar. The coalition is acting in defence of a legitimate Government.

If you would like me to say a little bit about who they are dealing with, because this Committee does not often linger in relation to that, let me say a little bit about the Houthi control of areas and put to you what would happen to the people of Yemen if the coalition was simply to walk away. The UN's 2017 *Children and Armed Conflict* report found that the Houthis were responsible for two thirds of the verified cases of child soldier recruitment in Yemen. The Panel of Experts reported that the Houthis had forcibly recruited children in schools, hospitals and door to door. Some 90% of the Yemeni districts prioritised by the UN for its cholera response were in Houthi-held areas in the north of Yemen. The Houthis delayed permission for a cholera vaccination campaign. The Houthi deliberately obstructed the humanitarian response. The Houthi take part in targeted assassinations in Sana'a. The way in which the Houthi are controlling areas, robbing the people of Yemen, should not go unremarked. That is the basis of the conflict.

Chair: Minister, in response to what you said about the Committee not hearing evidence, we took very powerful evidence in our first panel from one of the witnesses, making some of the points that you have just made. Certainly I and other members of this Committee, when Yemen is debated on the Floor of the House, have condemned those atrocities by the Houthis. I go back to Lloyd to ask another question, Minister, because you have had quite a long time to answer on the Houthis, which was not actually what you were asked about.

Lloyd Russell-Moyle: You will be able to come back on the wider bit in a second. You put an important point that, clearly, the Houthis are doing some really rather horrible things, but you seem to start your memory in 2012 and do not go back any further. Let us be clear that this is a President who was the only candidate on the ballot. The time since his mandate was up has since passed. He deposed the previous President, who is now on the side of the Houthis. Saudi Arabia, since 2004, have been involved in trying to repress and kill Houthis. The numbers of deaths in this conflict is clearly on the side of the Saudi coalition. Yes, the Houthis are doing awful things that we must condemn and stop. However, it is Saudi Arabia who is our ally. It is Saudi Arabia that we are arming. It is Saudi Arabia that is killing hundreds, if not thousands, of innocent people.

Chair: Lloyd, can you come to a question?

Q39 **Lloyd Russell-Moyle:** The latest figures are of over 50,000 innocent civilians. Do you not feel that we have a duty to start to stop arm sales



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when they are killing so many innocents?

Alistair Burt: We have a duty to do everything we can to bring the conflict to an end, because the suffering of the people of Yemen will only end when that occurs.

Q40 **Lloyd Russell-Moyle:** Why do we not stop arms sales to start with?

Alistair Burt: The arms sales are conducted under our rules of the consolidated criteria for arms sales. Licences are issued. International humanitarian—

Q41 **Lloyd Russell-Moyle:** These are European rules and the European Parliament—

Alistair Burt: If you do not give me a chance to finish, I cannot complete my sentences.

Chair: We will come to arms sales with Chris in a moment. Minister.

Alistair Burt: I am sorry, no: each licence that is issued is determined by the consolidated criteria, which we must go through.

Lloyd Russell-Moyle: Which the Minister overruled.

Alistair Burt: It is capable of being checked by the courts. There has been a case taken in the courts as to whether or not we are in breach of international humanitarian law. It was found that we were not. The most important thing is to bring the conflict to an end. The Government have not taken the view that ending arms sales to Saudi Arabia would make a significant contribution to ending the conflict in the way in which it must be ended. If that is the most important thing to the Committee and the House, that is what your Government is engaged upon.

Chair: We will come back to that in a moment, but Richard has a supplementary question.

Q42 **Richard Burden:** Could I just press you a little bit more on your assertion that the cases of targeting of civilians by the Saudi-led coalition are errors? The figures that have been published by the Yemen Data Project show that in September the amount of raids targeting civilians had gone up, not down. Around 48% of all Saudi-led coalition air raids in September hit civilian targets. That is three times the number that targeted military sites. If these are all errors, there seem to be an awful lot of them. What, in practical terms, is the UK Government doing to try to get the Saudi-led coalition to actually address those errors? Or if it is not actually credible that they are errors—there are just too many of them—what are we doing in practice to try to get them to stop?

Alistair Burt: Clearly, any bombing that ends up striking civilian targets is, first, a matter of condemnation if it is deliberate, and, secondly, a matter of concern if it happens as part of strikes designed for a military purpose, to push back the Houthi insurgency in order to lead to a better opportunity for negotiations to be successful. The work that the UK has



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been engaged on, over a lengthy period of time with the Saudi forces, is on advice in relation to targeting—how it is devised. It does not involve any targeting of any actual operations that take place. We do not have a role to play in relation to that. If anything has gone wrong and needs to be investigated, then the liaison team in Riyadh would be advised about that, and then the work of investigation can take place. What is impossible to gauge, of course, is the impact in the training that there has been to avoid errors. It is only when things occur that we find out there has been a mistake; nobody knows about the other operations that have been successful and where there has been no risk or anything like that.

Q43 Richard Burden: If the numbers have gone up and the proportions have gone up, it surely means that the advice that the UK is offering is either irrelevant and not having any impact at all, or it is providing cover for more attacks on civilian sites, not less. If so, it is not achieving anything, is it? At best, it is not achieving anything, and it could be providing cover for allowing things to get worse.

Alistair Burt: Our overall view of the situation is of course that the conflict needs to come to an end. We have repeatedly said that there is no military solution here. Every day that goes by, there is a risk of civilians being caught up in the conflict, on one side or the other, which is why we are so determined to keep pressing for an end to the conflict. Every incident that takes place where there is a potential violation of international humanitarian law is taken seriously by us. Saudi Arabia, as publicly stated, investigates those reports of alleged violations. The Joint Incidents Assessment Team does that. It acts on the lessons that it has learned from that, and we will continue to press for them to do just that.

Q44 Chris Law: I am a little bit thrown by quite a lot of things that have been said today, and deeply moved. I wonder, Minister, how you feel about the paradox between arms and aid. Could you drill down a little bit into the detail on how many personnel you have who sell arms directly to Saudi Arabia and what the total revenues were in the last 12 months from arms to Saudi Arabia? Before you come up with those figures, just to be clear, over 35% of all sales that we have globally go to Saudi Arabia; is that not true?

Alistair Burt: I am not sure about that percentage. I can tell you the value of UK defence exports in 2017 to Saudi Arabia was £1.2 billion. Approximately 2,500 UK jobs directly support the MOD Saudi armed forces projects, and a further 20,000 jobs support the supply chain, mainly in the north-west and south-west of England. That is the scale of the support.

That is incidental to decisions by the United Kingdom in relation to its values, its concerns about conflict and the right thing that needs to be done. As I say, we are very clear that the important thing here is to see a negotiated end to a conflict. We understand the legitimate reasons for the coalition being engaged. We understand that the coalition is itself at



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threat from missiles that could do substantial damage and may completely change the balance of power in the region. Above all, we want the conflict to come to an end. The arms sales figures and jobs involved are clearly of some importance, but they are not the deciding factor for the United Kingdom.

Q45 Chris Law: You say they are not of that importance; they are our biggest export. Ninety per cent. of the UK public do not support this war. Is this becoming the UK Government's Iraq War or similar?

Alistair Burt: Again, I go back to a discussion we had earlier, but we cannot spend time on it. The overwhelming balance of media reporting on the war and the overwhelming balance of interest in Parliament is directed towards the coalition parties and its involvement in the war.

Q46 Chris Law: That is because we are on that side. That is of primary importance here. It is a responsibility for all of us and to the taxpayer.

Alistair Burt: It is a mixture of things. Often that is misconstrued. I was asked by a member of the SNP today in Parliament about the invasion of Yemen by the coalition, which is a clear misunderstanding of the origins in relation to the war. No wonder, if that is what people think, that they put all of their attention into the efforts of the coalition and all of that.

I read out some of the things that the Houthi are involved in, and I was with Lise Grande of the UN at the weekend, who says that the majority of those at risk of famine in Houthi-controlled areas are those belonging to sectarian and ethnic groups that the Houthi do not regard very well. None of this comes out. No wonder the media concentration is where it is. I understand the interest, and I can understand why people are concerned about arms sales and everything else. We are concerned with ending the conflict, because that is the most important thing.

Q47 Chris Law: I appreciate the points you are making. We were just told in the previous session that, as politicians, we are facing the biggest famine in our political history.

Alistair Burt: Sure.

Q48 Chris Law: We are complicit in that, through our arms sales and through the relationship we have in the coalition. I just want to turn to the aid side. How much have we spent on aid in the last 12 months?

Alistair Burt: £170 million.

Q49 Chris Law: You can see the contradiction, can you not? We are spending a drop in the ocean compared with the sales of arms, which are perpetuating this war, and the vast majority of people out there, and who are watching this today, are horrified by that.

Alistair Burt: I understand the point that is put, but, first, it implies a simplistic equation that our ending support for Saudi Arabia would end the conflict. I just do not believe that is true.



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Q50 Chris Law: We have just heard that from the previous panel. In particular, the Norwegian Refugee Council said, "The thing we need to state to you today is it is time to cease it and to cease it now". The end point is now gone. We have to finish it now.

Alistair Burt: The conflict should come to an end. I do not agree that if the United Kingdom was simply to deny its support for a party that is under threat itself, engaged in the support of a legitimate Government—

Lloyd Russell-Moyle: I am sorry; you cannot keep saying "legitimate Government". It is a joke.

Chair: Lloyd, let the Minister reply.

Alistair Burt: You might want to go back to the UN resolution, unless you have decided to treat UN Resolution 2216 as a joke as well, because if that is the case, then that is fine—we can all pack up and go home, and we need not support any rules-based international organisations whatsoever.

Q51 Chair: Minister, seriously, on that issue and the points that Lloyd raised, your colleague, the former Secretary of State for International Development, Andrew Mitchell, makes the same case, very powerfully and persuasively, that, yes, there is that UN resolution, but the reality on the ground is this is a regime whose leader cannot visit the country that he is supposedly the legitimate President of.

Alistair Burt: He cannot because the Houthi are chasing him out.

Q52 Chair: Is it only for that reason? Does he genuinely have popular support in that country?

Alistair Burt: What is this debate about? Is this debate about the legitimacy of the conflict in the first place? If perhaps you would like to inquire into that, that is fine, but I do not think that is what this debate is about. It is about how we can bring the conflict to an end and what the United Kingdom's role is. There is a legitimate UN base for support for those who are trying to overturn an insurgency, some of the details of which I have given. You are obviously aware of the other details of Houthi control. If you think it is a good resolution of this conflict that the Houthi remain in control of Yemen, that a legitimate Government is usurped—

Chair: Minister, you are putting words into Committee members' mouths. No member of this Committee believes that, and I think you know that, Minister.

Alistair Burt: That is fine. If, then, that is not to be the case, how is it to be brought to an end? It is to be brought to an end through the efforts of the UN Security Council and the efforts of the special envoy. That is what he has told us and that is what he is working on. If you want to see an end to the conflict, you will support Martin Griffiths and his efforts.

Chair: I absolutely do, and I am sure other members of the Committee do. It is legitimate for us, as part of this inquiry, to raise questions about



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the impact of the UK's very, very close relationship with one side in the conflict.

Alistair Burt: That is fine.

- Q53 **Chair:** Do the Government not reflect at all that there might be a case to reconsider the full-blooded relationship between the UK and the Saudi-led coalition? Is there no review of this, in the light of Khashoggi, perhaps?

Alistair Burt: That gets us into a different area. Clearly, the events in relation to Jamal Khashoggi have been spoken about by both the Prime Minister and the Foreign Secretary, and there is no doubt about the UK's position, in that we condemn what has happened. It looks to be pre-meditated murder; that has been admitted by the prosecutor in Saudi Arabia. We have called for a full investigation, line of responsibility and accountability. That is very important. At the end of that, the United Kingdom will grade its response to what has happened based on the credibility of the explanations, and the confidence that the United Kingdom has that the events cannot and would not be repeated. That is one particular incident.

In relation to the conflict going on in Yemen, I go back to Resolution 2216, the origins of the conflict and the national dialogue process. The Committee will know as much about the background to Yemen as I do, including the reign of Ali Abdullah Saleh, the relationship of conflicts over a period of time, the issues between the Houthi and Saudi Arabia, and the mess that there was, but it was all made appreciably worse by the insurgency that prevented the national dialogue coming to a conclusion and leading to the events that we all have here. That is separate from the considerations in relation to the Jamal Khashoggi case. The relationship between the United Kingdom and Saudi Arabia, like everything else, is always kept under review in light of events.

- Q54 **Chair:** Does the Khashoggi case not speak to the character of the regime in Riyadh, which is relevant to what we have heard about related to Yemen?

Alistair Burt: Let us see what the investigation produces, but it is not an illegitimate question, Chairman; I understand that.

Chair: Thank you.

- Q55 **Paul Scully:** Thank you very much, Minister. Turning to how we are trying to alleviate the situation at the moment, we have spoken on a number of occasions, and we heard from the first panel, about Hodeidah port and its importance. What is the UK doing to ensure that it stays open, considering the increase in fighting around Hodeidah recently?

Alistair Burt: There have been UK efforts over a lengthy period of time to achieve things at the port. We have always recognised the importance of Hodeidah. Other ports cannot compete in terms of being able to take through the volume of goods and everything else. What we have sought to do is work with partners to keep Hodeidah open. We have been heavily



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involved in the UNVIM programme of inspection to reassure the coalition that Hodeidah was not being used to transfer armaments in to be used by Houthi forces. We have worked recently with the Government of Yemen to try to ensure that the decisions they we are trying to take to protect the economy in relation to the riyal, such as lines of credit, were not misused but were available for commercial shipping. Last month, for the first time in a long time, there was an oversupply of the month's food into Hodeidah. Our actions have been to be involved with partners to try to make sure that decisions are not taken by the Government of Yemen or anyone else to restrict access to the ports, and to try to make sure that we can get as many ships as possible, for fuel and for food, to come in.

Q56 Paul Scully: It is obviously too far away to be able to transfer humanitarian aid, in terms of where the demand is. Are you aware of any updates on the opening of Jizan port in Saudi? They had spoken about the possibility of opening it up to access some aid.

Alistair Burt: Our view has always been that, although other points can be opened, the distances required to travel, the number of checkpoints that may be gone through, and the risk of losing food made the other ports more difficult to use, like Aden itself.

Louise Walker: At the end of last year we actually sent someone to Jizan to take a look at the port. We have done a technical analysis that looks at the infrastructure that is there—berths and how deep things are—and we do not think that it can take anywhere near the volume of aid, or commercial and humanitarian imports that Hodeidah and Saleef can. There really is no substitute for Hodeidah and Saleef. The World Food Programme and others do bring in containerised shipments, containerised aid, through Aden, and we are also in the early stages of looking at land routes through Oman. We are looking at every possible way to keep food coming in, but Hodeidah and Saleef are irreplaceable.

Q57 Paul Scully: Is that your Plan B, if you cannot get Hodeidah unblocked?

Louise Walker: We cannot execute a Plan B. There are nine ships today berthed at Hodeidah and Saleef. It is completely full. It is business as usual. Despite everything that is going on, there are no restrictions at Hodeidah and Saleef. Fuel and food are coming in.

Alistair Burt: It is absolutely vital that it remains based around Hodeidah. There is not a Plan B apart from Hodeidah. If Hodeidah is cut off, it would make it still worse. That is why it is essential that it is not mined and that there is no artificial restriction to getting ships in.

Q58 Paul Scully: Are you concerned about a full onslaught into Hodeidah from Saudi forces—from coalition forces?

Alistair Burt: We would always be concerned with any action like that, and all of our comments have advised against anything similar to that.

Chair: We should pay tribute to the UK role in getting the blockade of



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Hodeidah lifted last year.

Alistair Burt: The access restrictions, Chairman.

Chair: Yes, indeed.

Q59 **Paul Scully:** What are you doing to keep humanitarian access on the ground available and open? We have talked about the ports.

Alistair Burt: Again, it is a very good question. It is one thing to get it into the ports; it is another thing to get it around the place. First, without over-egging it, I would say humanitarian access to Houthi areas is much more difficult than those controlled by the Government of Yemen. I would be grateful if the Committee would always bear that in mind. Secondly, conflict going on does make it more difficult. The main road between Hodeidah and Sana'a has been a target, because it is a key military objective. We have been resolute, along with our humanitarian partners, in making clear to the parties that those routes must remain available, open and accessible. We work closely with the UN on the ground to try to ensure that that is the case.

Q60 **Chris Law:** With regards to ports, we heard in the session before you came in about other ports that would be available in Yemen that have not been explored and would have advantages, not only for alleviating the situation in Hodeidah but also in terms of geographical distribution, particularly into the south. Have those ports been investigated as options outwith Hodeidah?

Louise Walker: I would say different ports do different things. Mukalla is mostly fuel, so fuel is coming in through there right now. Mokha is not viable at the moment; it is severely damaged and the infrastructure has not been replaced. We are looking at all of this. Aden in the south is really the major port that is operational, and it takes containerised shipments, but it takes not just food and fuel; it takes everything. Food and fuel are coming in alongside everything else that must be imported into Yemen, as well as containerised shipments.

Alistair Burt: What we have always tried to do, recognising that different commodities have different routes, is recognise, where there is a particular blockage, what we can do to assist. In terms of fuel, for example, at the end of 2017 we provided £10 million for a revolving fuel facility, managed by the UN, to procure and then sell fuel to the humanitarian community, to power hospitals and fuel water stations. This contribution has led to three shipments of fuel being brought into Yemen, purchased by UNICEF and the WHO to fund their operations. Where we can see blockages, we act, and we recognise that different ports and different areas of access have different advantages.

In total, there is not actually an alternative to Hodeidah. It has to be there and it has to be open. That is why we did so much when the access restrictions were put in. Again, the access restrictions were put in because people were using a route into Yemen to provide missiles to fire



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at the Saudis, who then said, "We cannot have this". We then offered to help through the UNVIM process of inspections, and did everything we could to ease the restrictions, which has happened. In responding to the difficulties of the conflict, we used the influence we have with those who are involved to seek an advantage for those who are already under pressure and to relieve humanitarian concerns. That is the advantage we have by having the relationship that we do, difficult though it is.

Q61 Mrs Latham: Going on now to famine prevention, public sector pay has been difficult, to say the least, but it is a prerequisite to any meaningful famine prevention or a response plan by the international community. What steps have we, the UK, taken to encourage and facilitate those payments to be made by the Government of Yemen and the Houthi authorities? Do you ever see a time when public sector pay could be up and running, and what difference do you think it would make?

Alistair Burt: This has been an issue for quite some time, and the Committee will have dealt with it before. We have always been of the view that it has been possible, from the limited resources of the Government of Yemen, to pay public sector salaries. I have had a number of conversations with the Government of Yemen, at very senior levels, about why this is not done. We have encouraged other actors to take part, and the Saudis have certainly been supportive in relation to that, and money has started to flow into this.

There is a new and added complication, having spoken to the UN just over the course of the weekend. Not everybody on the list of health workers or education workers is necessarily all they seem. There are those on the lists who may be insurgents and may be terrorists. Accordingly, no one is going to use taxpayers' money and just pay salaries based on a list that has been handed to them in order to achieve this. This is a new complication, done entirely by those who seek to abuse the lists in order to make it more difficult.

We are absolutely clear that, where health workers and public sector workers can be paid, they should be. It is essential, and it was really helpful during the vaccination campaigns, when some of the agencies stepped in in order to do that job. Lists have to be scrubbed, and they have to be scrubbed well, in order to make sure that money is not going in the wrong direction. That is a new complication. It is very important that the money is paid.

Q62 Mrs Latham: It is important. These are mainly middle-class people, and if they cannot feed their families, it is going to cause more deaths. How do you think it can be made sure that those lists are correct and that, therefore, the right people are getting the money?

Alistair Burt: As I am sure you are aware, there has been a further issue recently—since the middle of the year. The value of the riyal has fallen, and what that has done is increase the food bill. Exactly the families that you are describing were able to pay for food for their



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families, but the cost has just gone up. That is why there have been intense efforts over the summer, which we have been involved in, to get more money put into the economy.

As I said right at the beginning, one of the ways of doing this was to support the Government of Yemen and the Central Bank of Yemen through support to the reserves. We now do not think this is sufficient, and that liquidity—actual cash—has to go into the economy. Doing that will reduce the price of foodstuffs and help families to be able to pay for the food that is going in.

It is a combination of things that is needed: access to foodstuffs, access to fuel and water, and the ability to pay for them when they are available. Again, a war economy has benefited those who have controlled access to goods, which is another reason why the Houthi control of areas has been so damaging to the people of Yemen.

Q63 Mrs Latham: You did say that more food is getting in there, but if they cannot afford to buy it because they are not being paid, then who is going to make sure that those lists are correct and that the right people and genuine people get paid, and how quickly can they do that?

Alistair Burt: The UN takes that responsibility, and the UN co-ordinator was clear that, with more information she and the UN could do that job. They do recognise how important this has been. As I say, this is not a new issue; this has been going on for a long time, and I declare absolute frustration, over a lengthy period of time, with the Government of Yemen for its inability to deliver on the payment of public sector salaries.

Q64 Chair: We raised this issue, did we not, Pauline, in a predecessor Committee report two and a half years ago. I am very interested in this new issue, Minister, of people who might have terrorist involvement. There is also a separate issue around ghost names of people who may not still be around. Can you give us a sense of what the likely proportions are of those two categories compared to those who are legitimate nurses and teachers?

Alistair Burt: I was given the understanding it is not immaterial. We are not talking about 1% or 2% at the end of a big list. It is more than that. We have done our best. Part of the £95 million we put into UNICEF for alleviating this has been used for the payment of public sector salaries and incentive payments to healthcare workers. Again, where we can, we try to use what influence we have and get money and support in to deal with the very issues that you raise.

Q65 Richard Burden: Could I ask you a little bit about access to and from the country by air, rather than sea? Sana'a International Airport, for example, is absolutely vital to get medical supplies but also to get medical evacuations out of the country. Can you tell us what the UK is doing to support the reopening of Sana'a Airport for civilian aircraft, and what response you are getting to that from the Saudi-led coalition?



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Alistair Burt: The coalition has long had concerns about the commercial uses of Sana'a Airport, which is why it has been effectively closed for commercial flights. The coalition has been responsive to requirements for medical supplies. Regular flights of humanitarian personnel and humanitarian goods are continuing, including for high-level medical supplies. In September, the Logistics Cluster flew in over 100 metric tonnes of goods on behalf of the International Organisation for Migration, UNICEF and the WHO. We drafted and co-ordinated the March 2018 presidential statement that called for increased access to Sana'a Airport. We would like to see it open. That can only be done if the coalition is convinced that it will not be misused. It has been more open for humanitarian purposes, and we have played a part in making sure that has been the case.

Q66 **Richard Burden:** It is good to hear that in terms of supplies going in, but some of the evidence we had earlier on today was also about patients from Sana'a getting out to receive medical treatment abroad. Is there any progress on that?

Alistair Burt: We are always pressing the case in relation to that. Again, it is a murky business about who comes in and out, and there have been concerns about the misuse of this. Of course, it was one of the reasons behind the difficulties of Geneva, as the Chairman was alluding to. We are clear that there should be whatever access is necessary for the moving of people who need medical aid and assistance.

The Committee is probably also aware that Martin Griffiths has this as one of the confidence-building measures he is working on. Going back to what we were talking about earlier, he is trying to build up confidence between the parties. He does not see it as an open-and-shut case, where there is only one group of people involved and, if you do things to them, it will all come to an end. It is more complex than that. All we are trying to do is use whatever influence we can to work on and support those confidence-building measures, calling out the things we think are wrong in relation to denial of access and the like, and to use whatever influence we can to improve things. Sana'a Airport is certainly one of those.

Q67 **Richard Burden:** The health situation is obviously dire in the country. Could you tell us any more about what DFID is doing to try to improve health outcomes?

Alistair Burt: I can. There is a lot here. First, in relation to cholera, we really have done our level best to lead responses in relation to cholera. I have chaired a couple of international meetings calling for extra support in relation to that. The vaccination campaign this year has been the most successful so far. I am always putting in inverted commas what success means in the circumstances we are talking about. The number of cases has dropped, and the impact on cholera has been substantial. As I said earlier, we are providing £96.5 million in funding to UNICEF over the next three years. This funding will help treat over 3.25 million children for childhood illnesses, as well as supporting some 800,000 people for



reproductive health services, 292,000 women with antenatal check-ups and 117,000 women during childbirth.

However, it is not enough. At the UN General Assembly, I chaired a call to action to bring together UN agencies, NGOs and donors to make a series of commitments to help millions of malnourished Yemenis. The reason for dealing with malnutrition, of course, is that famine deals a blow to the immune system and makes people more susceptible to disease, and therefore there is a knock-on effect on health. In April this year, I chaired a cholera roundtable with donors, NGOs and UN agencies in order to encourage the activity I mentioned earlier in relation to cholera, and that has also had some success. We put our resources into UNICEF. We use our resources very carefully. As suggested, we work with Gavi and the WHO in terms of vaccination. We are seeking to relieve the medical condition. Again, I come back to the central point of what we are here about: none of this will be truly successful unless the conflict comes to an end. Apart from that, it is all sticking plasters.

I did not really pick up on what Mr Law was saying about the dilemma between aid and arms. I am the one Minister who balances both. I am the only Minister who deals with both the development aspects and the political ones. The Secretary of State for Foreign Affairs has his responsibilities. The Secretary of State for International Development has hers. Of course, the Prime Minister has it all. In terms of one ministerial involvement, I am dealing on the same day with what we are trying to do on the humanitarian side and dealing with the politics of it, which, as I have explained, cause controversy and on which feelings are very strong, and I understand why. Do you want to know what it is like? It is dreadful.

Q68 Chair: Can I move us on to education and children? Save the Children has warned of a lost generation of children in Yemen, and we have heard the same from the evidence earlier this afternoon from the Norwegian Refugee Council. Can you tell us what DFID, in these, frankly, near-impossible circumstances is trying to do to reach the children of Yemen with some sort of education, including for those many displaced children in the country?

Alistair Burt: There are two big programmes that we seek to fund: Education Cannot Wait and the Global Partnership for Education. These are both programmes that have come through to support children in conflict in recent years. We are one of the largest donors to Education Cannot Wait. That committed £15 million to Yemen last year, and reached over 700,000 children with help in relation to examinations, teaching equipment and the like. These two programmes are the best way in which we can seek to do this. Agencies are right to talk about a lost generation.

There has been some movement on this over the years. My understanding is that some years ago, for children caught up in conflict, the priority was to keep them safe, fed and healthy, but then we realised about the education side as conflicts went on longer. In Syria, as we are



aware, in five years people have lost a whole secondary set of education. What is the common statistic? A third of children caught up in conflict lose their primary education, and two-thirds lose their secondary education. These two programmes have provided some help and assistance, and we have been very active in supporting these.

Q69 **Chair:** You rightly said, in answer to Richard's question on health—and you could have said the same in answer to my question on education—that in the end what we need is peace and a ceasefire. In a sense, I wanted to finish my questioning by taking us back to our earlier exchange around Martin Griffiths' role. I absolutely agree with you that his role is crucial. I take his word as being of great significance. Can I ask you: are you saying that if and when Martin Griffiths feels the time is right, the UK will then support a new Security Council resolution, which would include provision for a ceasefire?

Alistair Burt: I cannot imagine a situation, if we are backing the UN special envoy, in which, if he comes to us with a clear sense, we would not be able to support him. The whole point of our support for him, and his own position with us in saying, "We do not want a resolution at this stage. Let me get on with the job I am doing," is that, if our support for him has credibility, and he feels the situation has changed, then obviously he has a relationship with the Security Council and with the Secretary-General. Without having been in that situation, and without knowing precisely what the situation would be, it would be difficult, if he felt his advice was such, for us to contradict that, unless we had really, really good reasons. I do repeat what I said earlier: the presidential statement was about creating the circumstances leading to a ceasefire

Chair: It was a very welcome presidential statement.

Alistair Burt: I also said, in answer both downstairs and here, that, when the time is right, such a resolution will come forward. Is there a possibility of a ceasefire resolution? Yes, of course there is, but the timing has to be right. I do stress that, to believe it is a magic formula—

Chair: No, we certainly do not think that.

Alistair Burt: Let us work with the person on the ground who believes he has the best opportunity of building confidence between the parties and nearly has them there. Let us look at what else we can do. I do stress again that, over the weekend, I met with the UN, I met with parties to the coalition, I met with the Vice-President of Yemen and I met with the United States. We were not talking about the World Series; this is really right up there, but it is complex for all of the reasons that I have given. A lot hangs on this, as we have discussed before. It is not just about Yemen; it is about the regional situation, it is about proxies and it is about everything else. The people of Yemen are paying the price. To get an answer for this is difficult and complex. It takes patience and it takes relationships that may be uncomfortable but may be, in the long run, the better thing to be doing. That is what we are trying to do.



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Q70 **Chair:** I am struck that it is some very respected international NGO leaders, like Jan Egeland, who we heard from earlier, and David Miliband at IRC, that are part of this call for a new UN Security Council resolution. I make that as a comment.

Alistair Burt: I can understand that. I am not surprised, and I do not think it is illegitimate, of course, that they have the view that they do.

Q71 **Mrs Latham:** This is a desperate situation in Yemen. There are some very vulnerable women and children, particularly young girls. What is the UK doing to help with the safeguarding of those young people and the women, in terms of sexual abuse and harassment?

Alistair Burt: I have something on women and children, Pauline. Forgive me—I just cannot quite find it.

Q72 **Mrs Latham:** It is rather sad that you actually cannot lay your hands on something that is really, really important. We had a conference about it last week.

Alistair Burt: As I said earlier, in the years up to 2021, we will support 800,000 women with reproductive healthcare, including the antenatal check-ups, child deliveries and postnatal visits. We are providing 1,500 women with sexual and gender-based violence support, including medical treatment, legal services and psychosocial counselling with UNHCR. Again, that work is part of the work that we do when we are able to reach people and give them the support that they need. As I said earlier in answer to the question about children, women and children's situations in conflicts used to almost be a by-product. They are not now. I think we have committed £250 million a year over four years to these services, to support women in conflict in relation to gender-based violence and sexual and reproductive health services. Some of that money is going into Yemen.

Q73 **Mrs Latham:** Is that just to the refugees who are outside of Yemen, or is that to women and girls, or young children, in Yemen as well?

Alistair Burt: It is in Yemen.

Q74 **Mrs Latham:** And the refugees that have left.

Alistair Burt: There are not so many refugees.

Louise Walker: There are actually very few refugees outside of Yemen, because they are too poor to leave, to be blunt about it. It is not the same situation as Syria. Our support is for the internally displaced, and that includes women who may have psychosocial support, or women who may have been victims of sexual violence as well. That is part of that programming for women and families who are internally displaced.

Q75 **Lloyd Russell-Moyle:** There was a report out earlier on today that the Saudi \$900 million support grant for UN OCHA came with 48 additional clauses for how UN OCHA needed to talk positively about Riyadh and



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promote the positive work that Saudi was doing. These are above and beyond the normal conditions that a state would give a UN body. The report also goes on to say—and this is in the *Guardian*—that these conditions are usual for Saudi Arabia in their aid. I wonder if the Minister has been made aware of these 48 additional conditions that Saudi Arabia had laid down, and if it would be possible for us to ensure that any partnerships that we are doing with UN OCHA with DFID money, or any DFID money that goes into UN OCHA, are not suddenly tainted with having to be an advertising agency for Saudi Arabia rather than focusing on the humanitarian relief that it needs to.

Alistair Burt: First, I have not seen this report, and I have not seen these conditions. My immediate response would be clearly that it is a matter for OCHA. We have no such relationship with OCHA. I would expect OCHA to defend its own integrity pretty well. It is a remarkable organisation. It is brilliantly led. As I say, I have no knowledge of this. I cannot for a moment imagine OCHA being compromised in such a way. I have no idea about these conditions or anything else. We put our support into OCHA and others, and then, being British, expect, every now and again, to receive a critical response to what we are doing if it is not seen to be enough, and if OCHA and colleagues want us to do more. We accept that, because that is the way we ought to work. I can assure you that we would be no party to anything different.

Q76 **Lloyd Russell-Moyle:** I do not question the way that DFID would give its money or that HMG would give their money. However, seeing as we do give money to OCHA, and we do give money that jointly supports humanitarian projects that the Saudis match, I wonder if it is something that we could go back and ensure—that our matched funding in OCHA, et cetera, is not leading to us being effectively bound by the same 48 conditions, because, of course, if you are doing one project, you fulfil the conditions of all the donors. I would hate to see a country—any country in the world—actually being able to start to put these additional conditions on, in terms of publicity. I wonder if it is something the Minister could go away and write back to me on.

Alistair Burt: Absolutely. I have not heard that. I can see how it might lead to something that would be difficult. I cannot imagine us playing any part in that. Of course, it is a legitimate question. Let us have a look and then give you a response. We could not be party to anything like that.

Q77 **Chris Law:** I just want to return to an earlier question. You did give some reflection on the situation with Khashoggi and what the circumstances would be, depending on the outcome. I want to ask you a simple question: would you consider sanctions against Saudi Arabia, and would they include cessation of arms, should the evidence prove that there has been a serious hand, from the top in Saudi Arabia, in the death of Khashoggi?

Alistair Burt: I must repeat the statement made by the Foreign Secretary. He said the response of the United Kingdom to what has



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happened will be conditioned on the credibility of the explanation given, and the confidence we have that circumstances could not and would not be repeated. Our response will depend on that, and that will be at the end of the investigation period. I cannot answer any further than that.

Q78 **Chris Law:** On that basis, is that similar to the way we have treated Russia this year? Would that be a “yes”?

Alistair Burt: I can only repeat what the Foreign Secretary has already said, and I will not stray anywhere else.

Chair: Minister, can I thank you and your officials for joining us today? This is the greatest humanitarian crisis of our time, and clearly there is a shared concern across Parliament and Government about this. There are differences of opinion about some of the policies needed to pursue this, so passions sometimes run high, but I am grateful, as ever, to you for coming before us and giving your evidence so fully today.

Alistair Burt: Chairman, I cannot tell you how much I hope this is the last time.